

AMENDMENT

Amendments to the Claims: Please replace all prior versions and listings of claims with the following listing of claims.

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-84. (Cancelled)

85. (Currently Amended) ~~A~~ ~~In a vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, a method of processing a mail piece~~ for detecting postage fraud using an indexed lookup procedure, comprising:

receiving, at ~~a~~ ~~the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, an~~ indexing tracking ID ~~a request and~~ for a first postage transaction ~~indicium request, directed from an end user computer;~~

allocating a unique ~~an indexing tracking ID number to~~ for the end user computer requested postage transaction, wherein the unique tracking number allocated to the postage transaction provides a mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service (USPS);

generating, data corresponding to a postage indicium at ~~the a vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, a unique in response to the postage indicium request for the requested postage transaction, wherein the unique postage indicium contains being associated with a mail piece and configured for processing through the United States Postal Service (USPS), wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises a digital signature derived from the indexing unique tracking ID number allocated to the postage transaction that provides the mail piece tracking capability within the USPS;~~

storing information for the data corresponding to the postage transaction in indicium within a database coupled to ~~[(of)] the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, wherein such that the indexing information stored for the postage transaction includes the unique tracking number ID is associated with the data corresponding to the postage~~

indiciu and the indexing tracking ID is usable as an index for the data corresponding to the unique postage indicium;

indexing transmitting the information stored for the postage transaction in the database with the indexing unique tracking ID number allocated to the end-user computer postage transaction;

retrieving receiving, at the information indexed with the unique tracking number from the database in response to receiving vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, a validation second postage indicium request, directed from the USPS, wherein the validation second postage indicium request received from the USPS relates to a mail piece carrying contains an indexing the unique tracking ID number; and

transmitting, from the postage-issuing computer system, retrieving the information retrieved data corresponding to the postage indicium from the database to based on the USPS, wherein the USPS determines whether to submit the mail piece carrying the unique indexing tracking ID number for delivery based on the information transmitted received from the USPS postage-issuing computer system.

86. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 85, wherein the indexing unique tracking ID number is unique within the USPS for at least one year.

87. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 85, wherein the information stored for data corresponding to the postage transaction further includes indiciu comprises data representative of one or more items selected from the group consisting of a postage amount, a date, a and time of postage information creation, a service class, an optional data advance, a meter number, an account number, or a destination and delivery zip code.

88-89. (Cancelled)

90. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[89]] 85, ~~wherein the digital signature is derived by further comprising:~~

applying a private key to the data corresponding to the unique postage indicium to derive a digital signature from the unique postage indicium, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction in the database further includes the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium; and

transmitting, from the postage-issuing computer system, the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium to the USPS in response to the validation request, wherein the USPS verifies that the postage-issuing computer system generated a postage indicium carried on the mail piece in response to determining that the digital signature transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system is consistent with a digital signature derived from the postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

91-92. (Cancelled)

93. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 85, wherein allocating the indexing unique tracking ID number to request is a first indexing tracking ID request, ~~the method further comprising requested postage transaction includes:~~

requesting sending, from the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, a second indexing unique tracking ID number request, which is directed to from the USPS, wherein the postage-issuing computer system requests the unique tracking number from the USPS; and

receiving, at the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, the indexing unique tracking ID number from the USPS in response to at the postage-issuing computer system second indexing tracking ID request, prior to allocating the indexing unique tracking ID number to for the end-user computer postage transaction.

94-96. (Cancelled)

97. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[88]] 85, wherein the indexing unique tracking ID number comprises [[is]] a USPS delivery confirmation code.

98. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 85, wherein the postage-issuing computer system receives the validation indicium request is received from the USPS over a communications link connecting the internet postage-issuing computer system with a computer system at the USPS.

99. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 98, further comprising transmitting the retrieved data corresponding to wherein the postage-issuing computer system transmits the information retrieved indicium from the database vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system to the USPS over the internet communications link.

100. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 99, further comprising transmitting wherein the indexing unique tracking ID number and the data corresponding to the unique postage indicium are transmitted to the end user computer in a format that enables the end user computer to print a one-dimensional bar code representative of the indexing unique tracking ID number and a two-dimensional bar code representative of the data corresponding to the unique postage indicium.

101. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 100, wherein transmitting the computer system at the USPS displays retrieved data corresponding to the information transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system indicium comprises transmitting the retrieved data corresponding to the postage indicium over the internet such that the data can be displayed at the USPS.

102. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 101, wherein the USPS verifies that the mail piece was sent from a trusted entity in response to the information transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system including one or more of indicium comprises either a meter number or an account number that is not part of the indexing tracking ID.

103. (Cancelled)

104. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 102, wherein the postage-issuing computer system transmits the indexing unique tracking ID number and the data corresponding to the unique postage indicium are transmitted from the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system to the end user computer over another communications link connecting the internet and the postage-issuing computer system with indicium request is received from the USPS over the internet end user computer.

105-123. (Cancelled)

124. (Currently Amended) A ~~vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system communicatively coupled with an end user computer and a United States Postal Service (USPS) computer system~~ for detecting postage fraud using an indexed lookup procedure, comprising:

a database coupled to a postage-issuing computer system;

a communications link that connects the postage-issuing computer system with an end user computer, and that further connects the postage-issuing computer system with a computer system at the United States Postal Service (USPS); and

data processing circuitry that executes on the postage-issuing computer system, wherein executing the data processing circuitry on the postage-issuing computer system causes the postage-issuing computer system to:

a database;

~~receive a tracking identification string allocation module, operable with request for a postage transaction from the data processing circuitry, programmed to end user computer;~~

~~allocate an indexing a unique tracking ID number to one of the requested postage transaction, wherein the end user computers in response to an indexing unique tracking ID number allocated to request from the one end user computer the postage transaction provides a mail piece tracking capability within the USPS;~~

~~a postage indicium generation module, operable with the data processing circuitry, programmed to generate data corresponding to a unique postage indicium associated with a mail piece in response to a request from for the end user computer requested postage transaction, wherein the unique postage indicium contains is configured for processing through the USPS and wherein the generated data comprises a digital signature derived from the indexing unique tracking ID number allocated to the postage transaction that provides the mail piece tracking capability within the USPS;~~

~~store information for an indexing module, operable with the data processing circuitry postage transaction in the database, wherein the information stored for programmed to associate the indexing tracking ID with the data corresponding to the postage transaction includes the unique tracking number and indicium such that the data corresponding to the unique postage indicium is indexed by the indexing tracking ID; and~~

~~index a database management module, operable with the data processing circuitry, programmed to store the information stored for data corresponding to the postage transaction in indicium within the database, and programmed to with the unique tracking number allocated to the postage transaction;~~

~~retrieve, based on the information indexed with the indexing unique tracking ID, the data corresponding to the postage indicium number from the database in response to receiving a validation postage indicium request received from the USPS computer system at the USPS, wherein the postage indicium validation request received from the~~

USPS relates to a mail piece carrying comprises the indexing unique tracking ID number;
and
transmit the information retrieved from the database to the USPS, wherein the
USPS determines whether to submit the mail piece carrying the unique tracking number
for delivery based on the transmitted information.

125. (Currently Amended) The ~~computer~~ system of claim 124, wherein the indexing unique tracking ID number is unique within the USPS for at least one year.

126. (Currently Amended) The ~~computer~~ system of claim 124, wherein the information stored for data corresponding to the postage transaction further includes indicium comprises data representative of one or more items selected from the group consisting of a postage amount, a date, a and time of postage information creation, a service class, an optional data advance, a meter number, an account number, or a destination and delivery zip code.

127. (Cancelled)

128. (Currently Amended) The ~~computer~~ system of claim ~~[[127]]~~ 124, wherein executing the data processing circuitry on the postage-issuing computer system further causes the postage-issuing computer system digital signature generation submodule is programmed to:

apply a private key to the data corresponding to the unique postage indicium to generate derive a digital signature from the unique postage indicium, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction in the database further includes the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium; and

transmit the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium to the USPS in response to the validation request, wherein the USPS verifies that the postage-issuing computer system generated a postage indicium carried on the mail piece in response to determining that the digital signature transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system is consistent with a digital signature derived from the postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

129-130. (Cancelled)

131. (Currently Amended) The ~~computer~~ system of claim 124, wherein executing further comprising a communications module operable with the data processing circuitry on the postage-issuing computer system further causes the postage-issuing computer system to:

~~transmit a request for the indexing unique tracking ID number from [[to]] the USPS computer system, to at the USPS; and~~

~~receive the indexing unique tracking ID number from the USPS computer system at the USPS prior in response to allocating the request for the indexing unique tracking number ID, to transmit the indexing tracking ID and the data corresponding to the postage indicium to the end user computer, and to receive the postage indicium request containing the indexing tracking ID from the USPS transaction.~~

132-137. (Cancelled)

138. (Currently Amended) The ~~computer~~ system of claim 124, wherein the USPS verifies that the mail piece was sent from a trusted entity data corresponding in response to determining that the information transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system includes one or more of indicium comprises a meter number or an account number that is not part of the indexing tracking ID.

139. (Currently Amended) The ~~computer~~ system of claim 124, wherein the indexing unique tracking ID number comprises [[is]] a USPS delivery confirmation code.

140. (Currently Amended) The ~~vendor controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 124, wherein executing the data processing circuitry on the postage-issuing computer system further comprising causes the postage-issuing computer system to:~~

~~a transaction database comprising a set of indexing tracking IDs; and~~

~~a comparison module, operable with the data processing circuitry, the comparison module being programmed to compare the indexing unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking ID number in from the database to a printed USPS postage indicium carried on request with the set of indexing tracking IDs mail piece.~~

141-142. (Cancelled)

143. (Currently Amended) ~~The vendor controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim [[127]] 124, wherein the postage-issuing computer system applies the private key to digital signature generation submodule is programmed to generate the digital signature from a data set that includes the indexing unique tracking ID number contained in and not a delivery zip code for the mail piece unique postage indicium to derive the digital signature from the unique postage indicium.~~

144. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 97, further comprising:

applying a private key to the wherein deriving the digital signature from the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises deriving the digital signature from a USPS delivery confirmation code to derive a digital signature from the unique postage indicium, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction in the database further includes the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium; and

transmitting, from the postage-issuing computer system, the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium to the USPS in response to the validation request, wherein the USPS verifies that the postage-issuing computer system generated a postage indicium carried on the mail piece in response to determining that the digital signature transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system is consistent with a digital signature derived from the postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

145. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 85, further comprising:

comparing the ~~indexing~~ unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking ID number in ~~[[of]]~~ the database retrieved data corresponding to a printed the postage indicium carried on with the indexing tracking ID received in the second postage indicium request from the USPS mail piece.

146. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 145, further comprising:

transmitting, from the ~~vendor controlled centralized~~ postage-issuing computer system ~~to the USPS, a response to the validation request received from the USPS, wherein the response to the validation request indicates an indication of whether the indexing tracking ID of the retrieved data corresponding to the unique postage indicium indexed with and the indexing unique tracking ID number in the database matches received in the second printed postage indicium carried on request received from the USPS are the same mail piece, wherein the USPS submits the mail piece for delivery in response to the unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking number in the database matching the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece.~~

147. (Currently Amended) ~~A in a vendor controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, a method of processing a mail piece for detecting postage fraud using an indexed lookup procedure, comprising:~~

~~generating, data corresponding to a postage indicium at a vendor controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, a unique postage indicium in response to the receiving a request for a postage transaction indicium request from an end user computer, wherein the unique postage indicium contains being associated with a and configured for processing through the United States Postal Service (USPS), wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises a digital signature derived from a USPS a unique delivery confirmation code allocated to the postage transaction that provides a mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service (USPS);~~

storing information for the data corresponding to the postage transaction in indicium within a database coupled to ~~[[of]]~~ the ~~vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, wherein such that the information stored for the postage transaction includes the~~ unique USPS delivery confirmation code is associated with the data corresponding to the postage indicium and the USPS delivery confirmation code is usable as an index for the data corresponding to the unique postage indicium;

indexing transmitting the information stored for the postage transaction in the database with the unique USPS delivery confirmation code allocated to the end-user computer postage transaction;

retrieving receiving, at the information indexed with the unique delivery confirmation code from the database in response to receiving vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, a validation postage indicium request transmitted from the USPS, wherein the validation postage indicium request received from the USPS relates to a mail piece carrying contains the unique USPS delivery confirmation code; and

transmitting, from the postage-issuing computer system, retrieving the information retrieved data corresponding to the postage indicium from the database to based on the USPS, wherein the USPS determines whether to submit the mail piece carrying the unique delivery confirmation code for delivery based on the information transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system.